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ABSTRACT

This paper, presented as part of a military lecture series given by the Division of Continuing Education and Community Service Speakers' Bureau of the University of Hawaii to military personnel at Schofield Barracks and Fort Shafter, investigates the origins and present status of Black English. A discussion of early studies in the Gullah dialect (spoken chiefly in Georgia and South Carolina) is used to point out that Gullah, or any other speech, does not have a "mutilated grammar," does not "violate the rules of logic," and does have rules other than following the "line of least resistance." Linguists accept without question the equality of linguistic talents among children of all races. Techniques for obtaining samples of natural speech and for testing the language ability of Black ghetto children have been based on misconceptions of language and language usage. The author argues against Bereiter's assumptions concerning the "underdeveloped" language of culturally deprived children and contrasts these assumptions with those of Labov, Stewart, Fasold, and others. He examines attitudes toward language and states that schools could help human relations greatly by making students aware of such linguistic phenomenon as different levels of speech usage, which do not necessarily coincide or have the same implications among speakers of different backgrounds. (AMM)

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BLACK ENGLISH

Charles-James N. Bailey

(A talk in the military lecture series presented by the division of continuing education and community service speakers' bureau of the University of Hawaii on the Black American given to military personnel at Schofield Barracks and Ft. Shafter.)

One could illustrate at some length the way in which persons are identified on the basis of how they speak. Different varieties of English spoken in different regions employ different tonal melodies in asking the most common type of question, like "Did you go there yesterday?" Some of these melodies express doubt or disbelief in other varieties of English and can be taken unintentionally as an insult to the listener. The degree of profanity which is common in Black ghettos can be interpreted as more profane than really intended and result in unfavorable treatment of the speaker which often may be unjustified. One can also cite examples of White Southerners trying to obtain housing by telephone inquiries in the North and receiving cool treatment because of being identified as Black on the basis of their accents. These, and countless other examples, make it obvious that one of the ways in which we are to understand our American community is through the study of language or speech differences.

What is Black English and who studies it? Black English is a variety of English, or rather many kinds of it, ranging all the way from the most illiterate speech in a ghetto or rural area on up to an educated standard that merges with the speech of educated Whites, where it is no longer identified as Black English. Today it is being investigated by a number of scholars, mostly called linguists or sociolinguists, whose job is to find out all that can be learned about human speech and its use by and effects on human beings in the area of Black English. Linguists are not grammarians in the older sense, and are not interested in "correct usage" as such. They are interested in grammar, though, and try to determine the rules governing the kinds of speech which they encounter--e.g. those of Black English.

You may also wonder why the government spends such sums as it does in support of studies of Black English. This is done to help us learn more about the structure of Black English, what different kinds of Black English are spoken, also by who and where, in order that this knowledge may be used for the welfare of Black people and the good of

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our whole society. Much that has already been learned should dispel a number of false ideas among educators which lead to negative results in the educational process and, when really misguided, sometimes produce quite harmful results in the pupils affected. It should be noted that linguists work on the analysis of language. To a large extent, the nature of their work leaves the application of what they learn to sociologists, educators, politicians, and others.

What follows here is a report on the work of those who have investigated the origins and present status of Black English. I should like to emphasize that nothing of what I shall say is the result of my own work. I shall rather be bringing to your notice aspects of the work of others with who I have professional connections or whose work I have read and consider worth passing on to you here. I think that what these scholars have learned and said about what they have learned will impress you as quite important and worthwhile. Indeed, I hope that some of the things I shall report will be found useful enough for some of the audience to implement them in your interpersonal relations and perhaps in some instances even in the education of American children. Some of the most important studies of ghetto English have been done by William Labov at Columbia University among teen-age gangs in Harlem. In a moment I shall discuss the work just mentioned--how Black teen-agers speak among themselves when the influence of outside observers is minimized in various ways--and the work of other linguists.

But first, let me do a couple of other things. I should like to discuss briefly the origins of Black English in the United States. I begin with the work of a brilliant Black linguist named Lorenzo Turner, who in 1949 published a book by the name of Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect in which, among other things, he displayed an enviable knowledge of a number of West African languages. For those of you who do not know what Gullah is, I should point out that it is a species of English which has been creolized or mixed with various Africanisms. It is spoken by Blacks and some Whites along the Atlantic Coast, chiefly in the state of Georgia and South Carolina. It used to be spoken by many upper-class Whites who had been brought up by Black nurses.

The motive for Turner's writing the book I have just referred to was to dispel the prevalent notion that Gullah is merely the survival of a sort of baby-talk used by Whites with Blacks in the earliest contacts between the two races before the Blacks had learned English, and the notion that nothing in the way Blacks speak English in the

New World goes back to sources other than English of one kind or another. The scholars who had ruled out any African mixture in Gullah--beyond a few words here and there--had also believed that all peculiarities of Southern White speech had no sources other than English ones. The two ideas go together. If, as Turner seems to have demonstrated fairly conclusively, many aspects of Gullah speech can be traced, at least ultimately, back to West African Black languages, then the similarities of the English spoken by Whites in Charleston, South Carolina, with Gullah would have to be attributed to the influence of their Black nurses.

Turner's study was a logical step in the study of the English spoken by Blacks in America. You may ask why it had not been done earlier. Turner quotes a number of the views that had prevailed before he undertook his work. Gullahs were characterized as "slovenly and careless of speech" (Turner 6), and one writer, a professor, even wrote the following (Turner 11):

> Gullah speech is conspicuous for its short cuts. Its grammar, which is but an abbreviated and mutilated English grammar, knows no rule except to follow the line of least resistance, violate all rules of logic, and say just that which is natural and to the point . . .

This was written in 1940. In the course of what I shall have to say tonight, I intend to give reasons which I hope will convince you that no part of the foregoing statement could be true--except the last part about saying what is natural and to the point. The writer just quoted goes on to say:

> It is usually thought that the Gullah Negro's confusion of gender is due to his ignorance and primitiveness. It is possible that his abuse of grammar in this respect is due not wholly to his naivete but to English and Scotch dialect influence through the unlettered bond servants who came among the slaves.

Turner points out the amazing fact that White investigators hardly ever turned up more than a score of non-English words in Gullah speech; for example, yam, samba, chigger, gumbo, kuta, tote, peewee, guba, nana, nyam, okra, and buckrah, the word for a White person. Some of these, for instance goober and cooter, have picked up a final r in the speech of Whites who pronounce their r's at the end of a word.

Turner explains the failure of White investigators to discover more Gullah words of non-English origin on the grounds that Gullah Blacks were reluctant (for many reasons) to speak their native brogue in the presence of outsiders. (We find the same thing here in Hawaii when we try to study the local speech which is erroneously termed "pidgin.") As a Black himself, Turner was far more successful in discovering the truth of the matter. The result of his investigations was to establish beyond any doubt that many characteristics of Gullah have African origins. It remains a disputed question whether these Africanisms go back to African languages spoken by the slaves in the United States, or whether they arrived through the intermediary of a Carribean creolized speech spoken by the slaves in the islands off of the North American Mainland before such slaves were imported into the United States. In any case, it would hardly stand to reason that the entire African heritage of the slaves would just disappear without a trace, given the situation in which they lived. But several writers had plausibly pointed out that the slaves were mixed in different language groups so as to reduce their communicating in any idiom other than English and thereby reduce their chances for planning a successful uprising. However, as Turner points out, even the principles of naming children among the Gullahs go back to West African practices. Even Whites have been found following similar usages, which are quite foreign to English-speaking customs. One obvious reason why Gullah speech has retained its individuality so long has been the isolation of many Gullahs on the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.

Turner (14) mentions an example of the way in which a White investigator of the Gullah speech may go wrong. One scholar recorded "done for fat" as meaning "excessively fat"; actually, the Gullahs say "dafa fat," dafa being the word for "fat" in the Vai language, spoken in Liberia and elsewhere.

The influences of the West African languages on Gullah English are not only found in words, but also in pronunciation and in grammatical usage. Just as we find in Hawaiian pidgin, Gullah lacks the vowel heard in the word cup in educated English, and for the same reason: The native tongues of the first slaves imported into the New World lacked this sound. Another similarity between Gullah and some varieties of the local English here in Hawaii is the dropping of the words is and are in many situations; for example, "You dumb; they smart."

Let me return now to the allegation that Gullah--or any other--speech has a mutilated grammar, violates the rules of logic, and knows no rules other than following the line of least resistance. My comments on this will be of some importance for Black English, since we shall see presently that comparable charges have been alleged by some educational authorities against the speech of Black children who are not Gullahs. In dealing with such views, I must have recourse to the findings of linguistics, which investigates the theory of grammar for language in general.

First is the well-known fact even among non-linguists that all children have the in-born ability to learn any language equally well. Put a Black or Yellow or Brown or White child among speakers of any African, Asian, or European language, and he will learn to speak it in a manner that is absolutely indistinguishable from the way the language is spoken by children of the native inhabitants of the locale in question. Since we all have slightly different mouth shapes and can easily make the necessary adjustments in the speech organs so that we all sound reasonably similar if our speech backgrounds are similar, there is nothing true in the view that different races have to speak differently because of differences in their anatomies. I mention this, since I have learned that it is a question on many peoples' minds. Of course, if we have some nervous defect, that will interfere with our speech, as will physical abnormalities like a cleft palate. And it is evident that if a tribe requires its women to have wooden blocks inserted into their lips, such women will lack the ordinary lip sounds like p and b to a high degree.

Add to the facts just mentioned the fantastic cleverness which all children, even quite unintelligent ones, display in mastering the most complex linguistic phenomena. Some of these are so complex, it has taken linguists a hundred years to pin them down, and the explanations are still not entirely fool-proof. Some language operations easily managed by four-years-olds are too complicated for even brilliant adults to learn. All this has led many linguists to assume that children are born with a high degree of linguistic prowess in them, so that they can acquire their languages by instinct rather than by learning--if by learning we mean thinking and solving problems. There is absolutely no reason to suppose that this instinct differs among normal human babies of any racial heritage. Indeed, there is evidence that children at certain ages have certain grammatical peculiarities in common, regardless of what language they have been exposed to. Thus, children all over the world apparently use multiple negatives--like "He won't see no boys there," but perhaps not in such a complex utterance at the stage of development I am speaking of--at a certain point in acquiring their

language, regardless of whether they have ever heard the adult speakers around them employ such a pattern. Some languages, like French, Russian, and Arabic, keep the multiple negatives as a grammatical rule in cultivated speech. Others exhibit a different rule in cultivated speech.

The concept of a rule in the present context requires special comment. All human speech has been found to be equally rule-governed. I am not referring to the kind of rules one is taught in school, which reflect someone's idea of what we ought to say. Rather I am speaking of the rules which linguists formulate in quite technical and complex formulas to stipulate what a given kind of language sounds like--not what it should sound like, but what it does sound like. All forms of human speech are amenable to such rules, and in the same degree. If this were not so, you and I could not do what we do all the time and without any trouble: Say sentences never heard before and understand sentences spoken by others which we have never heard previously. I can make a sentence up this very moment which I am sure you will not have encountered before, but will easily understand: "The linguist swam across the creek at Schofield Barracks last Thursday." And I am equally confident that no one here will have any hesitation in knowing that the following previously unencountered utterance is not an English sentence: "He one my the yet." If human speech were not governed by rules known to speakers and hearers, in the sense of rule which is under discussion, we could only repeat and understand sentences we had been previously taught. That would require memorizing all the possible sentences of the language, or at least too large a number of sentence models to sound like a realistic or sane theory of our ability to use our native languages. In the light of these considerations, any suggestion that Gullah or any other kind of Black speech is not rule-abiding is absurd. And similar comments are appropriate for any suggestion that any form of human language is less logical than another--let alone, illogical. Linguists have found no trace of truth for such a surmise; two and two are four in all languages and dialects--Black, White, or Yellow. The English spoken in Black ghettos is just as mathematically characterizable as that spoken by Black or White professors--no more and no less. If humans have anything in common, they have their language skills in common, at least while still children. Animals will never exhibit a human-like language, for they can only reproduce (variants on) a few limited patterns known to all members of their species; they cannot create new messages in the manner

available to the most unintelligent child. Any person in this audience, whether linguistically trained or not, knows that "It's not likely that he went there" is like "That he went there is not likely" in a way which does not hold good for "That he went is not likely there." And this is true even of those who would seldom if ever say "That he went there is not likely" in place of "It's not likely that he went there."

From all that has been said, it is clear that linguists accept without question the equality of linguistic talents among children of all races. What do writers in education and allied subjects say? While writing her doctoral thesis, Anne E. Hughes (referred to by R. W. Shuy in Baratz and Shuy 119-20) found teachers making comments like the following actual quotation: "In the inner-city, the child's vocabulary is very limited. His experiences are very limited." This view goes hand in hand with the notion that children from the Black ghettos are "non-verbal," which is widely held in some educational circles. Against this are the findings of S. S. Stodolsky and G. S. Lesser in an article in the Harvard Educational Review (1967; I quote from Stewart in Baratz and Shuy 206), virtually all of which show "that American Negroes of all socio-economic classes show a relatively high level of verbal ability. . . only Jews showed a higher level in this ability." The reasons for this are not far to seek: People who are illiterate have more time for, and depend more on, the spoken language; they are characteristically more adept here than the average literate. There are good reasons why they have to be. Their sullen silence in the presence of even friendly investigators is due to awe and the fear of making mistakes of the sort that have exposed them to ridicule in other situations.

Tests of language ability which are given to Black children from the ghetto are based on word usages and manners of speaking which are familiar to middle-class Whites and to educated Blacks, but not to the more disadvantaged. In addition, the corrections which ghetto children receive during their reading exercises in class are so misinformed that the children get so confused that they end up doubting all systematicity in the language norm. This induces random guessing; when this fails, the children become expert in ways of avoiding responses that will, for reasons unknown to them, result in rebukes--however well-intentioned and kindly stated. Such developments may coincide with another development found in boys from the age of ten, or the fourth and fifth grades, on. This is the consciousness of group loyalties to their own age-mates, to their gangs. As these loyalties greatly influence the

language of such boys, their reading ability ceases to show great progress from this time on. They now consciously copy the speech of their fellow gang members as much as possible.

William Labov and some of his associates, Black and White, have devised techniques for overcoming the problem of obtaining samples of natural speech by an outsider. Labov found that, in order to get samples of natural speech, his investigators had to speak naturally in the eyes of the teenage gang members whose speech was being studied. This meant the introduction of taboo words commonly used by the boys. This technique quickly broke the ice. Riding a bus home together after an outing at the beach, the boys would quickly forget about the microphones around their collars in the friendly atmosphere created by the professors, who quickly took an interest in the things that were of interest to the boys. The boys were asked questions about the rules of the games they played in the streets, about an instance when they barely escaped death, and what they would do if they were a parent and their son came up and asked, "Daddy, what does the word nigger mean?" Such inquiries were designed to get the boys so emotionally involved in what they were saying that they would forget to monitor their language and speak the more freely. They were asked their opinion on whether a man should ever strike a woman in an argument, on the rules for fair fighting, and the like. It proved vital to have the boys together in a group; the isolated boy used for interviewing among educational psychologists clams up and presents the appearance of being non-verbal. Incidentally, Labov's methods were less successful with older boys and young men, who definitely preferred to be interviewed by a Black linguist.

So much for the ways of obtaining natural speech samples. These comments can be closed with a brief mention of the recording of such interviews. A single microphone in the middle of the group was ineffectual; it recorded chaos. So in addition to this microphone picking up the general conversation, additional tracks on the tape of a tape-recorder picked up the speech of the individual participants separately. It transpired that during such sessions a number of minor discussions between two boys might take place apart from the group conversation; or an individual might start humming to himself. Much important knowledge about human discourse has been gleaned from the analysis of such recordings.

Labov's work has produced abundant evidence that teenage Blacks in the ghettos are very clever with words; any allegations that they are not verbally adept must be abandoned by anyone who has any concern

for the truth. These boys possess skills not controlled by middle-class speakers. One of the most notable of these skills is the system of ritual insults known variously as sounding, signifying, the dozens, etc. Another skill is the display of occult knowledge sometimes known as rifting. There is also the delivery of a large body of oral epic poems known as toasts or jokes, which reminds us in some ways of what is found in many pre-literate cultures. Of course, many of these skills are irrelevant to present school curriculums, though there seems to be no compelling reason why this must continue to be so. Labov (1969d:55) records a dialogue between two Black boys in one of his writings in which a fourteen-year-old eighth-grader rated with a fourth-grade reading score carried on a very expressive and impressive logical argumentation, in the course of which he spoke this grammatically complex conditional sentence: "If they didn't learn, and they just stood around, they wouldn't have everything. . ." This evidence comes from a supposedly non-verbal youth!

Labov (1969c) points out two causes which educational psychologists have assigned as possible explanations of the inability of ghetto children to read as well as their middle-class White age-mates. Since these scholars were unwilling to base their views of the lower reading scores by Blacks on racial inferiority, they at first concluded that the cause lay in an environment lacking the appropriate experiences. When Operation Headstart, operating in terms of such conclusions, failed to correct the situation in the way that had been expected, rather than question their own assumptions, some of these scholars bought the other cause--genetic inferiority. I do not wish to review the course of the discussion that resulted among influential educators, but will rather turn now to consider the program devised by some planners to replace the older Headstart program.

Carl Bereiter and his associates at the University of Illinois have described their program in the chapter of a book (Hechinger 1966) on preschool education. Bereiter et al. (107) assert that from their earlier work "in teaching concrete logical operations it became evident that culturally deprived children do not just think at an immature level: many of them do not think at all." Methods of arriving at such an absurd conclusion should be questioned at once, as also the reasons for such limited successes as Bereiter's new program has shown. No linguist could accept the following view which Bereiter et al. (112-13) take over from another investigator, namely that the language of culturally deprived children "is not merely an underdeveloped version of standard English, but is a basically non-logical mode of expressive behavior which lacks the formal properties

necessary for the organization of thought." There is manifold evidence, assembled by Labov (1969b) and others, to prove the contrary. Before the non-linguist makes such erroneous statements about language, he should consult those who know the techniques which alone can ferret out the truth of the situation. The field of linguistics has not found many applications; but this certainly is one. I shall illustrate some of those techniques presently. But first, let me conclude my mention of Bereiter's program by telling you a little about his approach.

Bereiter begins with the assumption--which I regard as false, though some of the older linguists hold it--that the language of the ghetto and standard English are two different languages. Some have advocated teaching standard English as a foreign language, using second-language techniques like language laboratories and so on. Bereiter gets there a different way. He and his associates "proceeded much as if the children had no language at all" (113)! Given such an assumption, "the techniques of modern oral methods of foreign language teaching" which they adopted would hardly seem appropriate, for these emphasize and are predicated on controlling areas in which a new language contrasts with the grammatical structure of the learner's own, previously acquired, native language. It can hardly be regarded as adequate psychology to overlook so blatantly the first principle of pedagogy: Unlearning is far more difficult than learning.

Without taking time to comment on all the assumptions that would seem erroneous to linguists which are made by Bereiter and his fellow-workers, I shall yield to the limitations of time to make a single point, originally scored by Labov. If recent linguistic investigations have shown anything, they have shown that linguistic operations--even deletions of parts of a sentence resulting in what superficially seems like a simplified utterance, are anything but simple. If a child is asked, "Where are you sitting?" and he replies, "On the table" (cf. Bereiter et al. 117), he has performed a demonstrably more complex operation than if he answered the full statement, "I am sitting on the table," which Bereiter required of his Black pupils. The very fact that the child has not deleted other words but rather deleted precisely the constituents of the sentence which he did, is ample evidence of his latent knowledge of the parts of speech and the grammatical structure of the sentence. More than one technique of Bereiter and his associates (120-21) stresses answering with the--linguistically easier--full utterances. But as a matter of fact, the only evidence that the child was as ignorant of the grammar of English as Bereiter

claims would be if he answered with truncated sentences exhibiting a garbling of the grammatical make-up; for example, "Sitting on," or "On the." All of this should have been self-evident to anyone thinking about the matter as long as the Illinois investigators presumably did.

Of course, there is a more fundamental issue involved, namely, whether middle-class White English is--logically or otherwise--inherently better or more expressive than Black English. Labov (1969b) has produced evidence that the reverse is the case, if the criterion is straightforward argumentation unhampered by needless qualifications, red herrings, and reversals. It is obviously true that Black children must learn to read books and other materials written in standard English, an unquestionable goal of their schooling if they are to succeed in our culture. But whether they should be made to speak like the Whites around them is a different matter. Without questioning the need of a young man or woman, whether Black or White, to take speech training in order to become a television announcer or even telephone operator--the motivation for speaking a certain way would be built into such a situation--we should pause before concluding that everyone should be taught to speak a given way. Many standard speakers have had to adapt their speech to that of workers employed by them or supervised by them in order to communicate well, have good human relations, and produce effective results. The process is not all in one direction. Many Blacks will feel motivated to change their speech in certain situations, and the schools should be able to help them. But not being able to speak like one's own folk can be a depressing experience for some Blacks and Whites, and in any event it can only be harmful to a child's progress in both speaking and reading if the school confuses the two.

This lamentable result is exactly what we find when a teacher ignorant of the rules of Black English miscorrects a child reading "He pass' by bofa dem" for "He passed by both of them" for not having understood and read the passage correctly (Labov 1969c:60). This is not meant to blame the poor over-worked teacher, who has enough to do attending special institutes during his summers and keeping discipline in class, for not knowing as much as a linguist. But the schools will become blameworthy quite soon if they do not adapt some of the simpler findings of our discipline to their approach to teaching reading to ghetto children. It can be shown that the supposed error just cited has nothing to do with a Black child's reading ability, but is the result of his comprehension of the passage and a lightning-swift translation of great mental complexity into his own system of rules for pronouncing Black English. It is known that Black English drops the final sound in passed--namely [t]--when a vowel does not follow and in some Black English even when it does--exactly parallel to the standard deletion of t in moisten, soften, Christmas, nestle, last night, and waste paper, and of d in windmill, handbag, landmark, etc.

As the deletion is less likely before a vowel, it is in this position that the teacher should first stress pronouncing it, if he wants the pupils to learn the standard pronunciation. But what is more to the point is the fact that the same child who reads "He pass' by bofa dem" also reads (Labov 1969d:44): "He a'way' look' fo' trouble when he read [rhymed with bed] de news." In this latter sentence the passage contained the word spelled r-e-a-d, which is pronounced like reed when present and as a rhyme of bed when past. That the child pronounced it correctly rhyming with bed proves that he understood the pastness of looked, even though the last sound of looked was deleted by his Black English rule to make this word sound exactly like the present form--look. Without an adequate understanding of the rules of Black pronunciation in the ghetto, a teacher would draw the wrong conclusion, confusing a pronunciational difference with a true reading mistake.

That children can convert what they read into their own system of pronunciational rules is a feat of great mental dexterity. Too bad that it gets rewarded with a reproval and the ensuing frustration within the child. The complexity of the translation can only be appreciated if we try to get a computer to do it. Consider this example, where a Black boy, under the stimulus of rewards for correctly imitating what he hears, effortlessly and unconsciously translates the utterance given to him into one that accords with the rules of his own Black English:

S: "Ask Albert if he knows how to play basketball."
R: "Axe Albert do he know how to play basketball."

This is comparable to the way in which White infants repeat negative sentences with double negatives which they have never heard, unaware all the time of having made any change.

When a Black child is wrongly corrected for misunderstanding what he has read, his perplexity leads to ultimate frustration, random guessing, and finally the giving up of the whole enterprise. Teachers should not be subject to the same misapprehensions about English which is exhibited by comic-strip-writers who indicate, for instance, "sez' as a sloppy pronunciation of says. The Black child's speech rules make him pronounce says as say in certain situations. This is not to be construed as a reading error.

Some specialists are now advocating and producing materials written in Black English as a first step toward training ghetto children to acquire the reading skills they will need in our society. These texts

are not simply ones that incorporate topics of interest to Black children. They may even be a Black translation of a Biblical passage. The crucial point is that the linguists who prepare these texts take care to use Black grammar and to see that the spelling reflects the rules of Black pronunciation. Such texts have been denounced in a Boston newspaper editorial by an editor who must have supposed that the aim of such projects is to produce Black-English texts and thus remove Black children further from the mainstream of our culture. The truth of the matter is quite otherwise--an aim to adapt materials to learners, rather than learners to materials. The child learning to read should not have to begin with a variety of English quite remote from his own, so that he has the problem of translation added to that of learning the technique of reading. He can learn the rationale of spelling much better when the text reflects his own pronunciations. The subsequent texts can be carefully adulterated with standard spellings through careful programming accompanied by due explanations to the pupils of each element that gets added when it gets added.

A layman untrained in linguistics might suppose that when he hears a Black say, "It John book" (for "It's John's book"), that the Black lacks the possessive ending on John as well as the word is. Both surmises turn out false when the same Black person says, "Issa book a John's" (for "It's a book of John's"), not: "Idda booka John." The truth of the issue is that the dropping of final -s is a pronunciational matter, not a grammatical one in such instances. In a highly technical writing, Labov (1969a) has shown that the words is and are omitted in Black sentences precisely where they are shortened to 's and 're in White English, and nowhere else--not when emphatic, for example, or word-final. The situations where the abbreviation in White English and the deletion in Black English are allowed and forbidden are quite complex. No one with the mental and linguistic capacities which Bereiter and others ascribe to Black children could follow the rules as accurately as Black children are found to do. Their rule is an extremely complex one--so complex that it was impossible to formulate it until Labov's 1969 article. Maybe if linguists had looked more closely at Black English earlier, linguistic theory would today be more advanced than it is.

As Labov has emphasized in his writings, teaching a language is not like teaching arithmetic or geography--filling a vacuum of knowledge. Bereiter's technique is based on this premise. A child necessarily begins with his own rules of grammar, which cannot be ignored. Far from being totally different from those of his teacher, a Black child's language

rules will be far and away similar for the most part. Only the differences need be concentrated on in preparing and using reading materials, not the matters so stressed in Bereiter's program, where Black English has a pattern quite comparable to that of White English. Incidentally, Bereiter et al.(114) give no evidence of understanding me in the sentence they quote, "Me got juice." They evidently have forgotten that White English prefers me to I in some situations; e. g. "You think I did it--me?" As a matter of fact, it is not impossible that the use of me as a subject in some forms of Black English goes back ultimately to mi (meaning "I") in some West African tongues spoken by the forebears of American Blacks. There is at all events no need to assume that Black children cannot handle the simple case system of English pronouns. Illiterate Blacks in Africa handle with ease much more complex systems than speakers of White English have to deal with. Moreover, they were doing so long before the present advancement in the status of Blacks in Africa and America. I need not argue further to show that the statement by Bereiter et al. (114), "Without exaggerating, we may say that these four-year-olds could make no statements of any kind. They could not ask questions," reflects far more adversely on their own intelligence than on that of the children and can fairly be characterized only as blatant nonsense.

It is unsound to characterize a Black child's accurately following the complex rules of Black English as "sloppy" speech. Besides being scientifically incorrect, it wrongly creates a condescending attitude on the part of the person making such an observation. A far better attitude results when the child is credited for the skill he is actually displaying. Attention to details will produce such an attitude. A Black child will no more say, "Yes, he," than a White adult will say, "Yes, he's," for the more emphatic, "Yes, he is"--which is identical in both kinds of English. As soon as Black English is found to be just as rule-governed as the most academic White English, the former will not be chastized with the humiliating epithets of a Bereiter. The Black boy will just as normally say an emphatic, "Allah is God," as a White boy in the best suburban school will say, "It is John's."

A linguist like Labov can turn up some clever evidence to demonstrate facets of Black speech that might be regarded differently without such subtle evidence. Compare these attested responses to the sentence, "He gonna go tomorrow," in which a naive observer might suppose the word is or 's is absent from the speaker's consciousness: The same speaker may go on to add, "I know he is," showing that the word is was in his consciousness even in "He gonna go tomorrow." Or another Black

child may reply to this statement, "Is he?"--again proving that is preceded gonna in the first sentence in Black grammar, having been deleted by a mere sound rule in that position. Since such positions represent a complex amount of linguistic information, no child with the linguistic abilities that Bereiter attributes to Black children could obey the rule in question as well as Black children in fact do.

William A. Stewart is another astute observer. He writes (Stewart 1968:16, n. 22):

> Those who have had enough contact with Negro non-standard dialects to know that constructions like We tryin' usually indicate the present tense (i.e. STE "We are trying") might assume that the superficially similar construction we drinkin' in the NNS sentence We was eatin'--an' we drinkin', too also indicates the present tense--the whole thereby meaning "We were eating--and we are drinking, too" with an erroneous lack of tense agreement between the two clauses. Although it is true that we drinkin' does mean "we are drinking" [better: we're drinking (CJNB)] in most circumstances (cf. NNS We drinkin' right now), in the sentence cited the phrase really represents we was drinkin' with the past tense marker was omitted. . . .

Another observer with valuable insights is Ralph Fasold. In order to demonstrate that "He be in in a few minutes" contains an underlying will in Black grammar which, in the reduced form 'll, has been deleted by a pronunciation rule, Fasold (1969b:770) set up a test based on the following pattern: "He can drive a motorcycle. I know he can. Can what? Drive a motorcycle." When the sentence, "He be in in a few minutes," is given to Black speakers who have learned the pattern just outlined, they say: "He be in in a few minutes. I know he will. Will what? Be in in a few minutes."

It would be incorrect to say that the grammar of Black English has no fundamental differences from current standard English. Various writers have pointed out that these two Black English sentences mean different things: "He at school," and, "He be at school." "He at school," like "He sick," refers to a present or chronic situation. With be (never deleted), such sentences refer to recurrent situations, as in, "He be sick ever' time you show up," and, "He be at home mo' often dan 'e be at school." The subtle difference involved, lost on contemporary speakers of standard English, would have been transparent to the Elizabethan who penned this: "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires

known, and from whom no secrets are hid . . ." Another facet of one kind of Black English that poses problems of interpretation for standard speakers is the use of ben or ain' for past time. "Dey ben like sich a man" or "Dey ain' like dat" do not mean, respectively, "They've been like such a man" and "They aren't like that." The last would be Black English, "Dey not like dat," or, "Dey don' be like dat." Black English "Dey ben like sich a man" means "They('ve) liked such a man"; "Dey ain' like dat" means "They didn't like that."

Sometimes the things that Black children say in a classroom or that Black soldiers say in a military situation seem out of order to Whites, not because the White listeners would not use such expressions at all, but because they would not use them in the situations in question. The unthinking condemnation of speech forms which one person finds appropriate in a given situation but which we do not generates many problems in human relations that could be avoided. A professor of English who would never be inclined to use ain't in almost any situation would not even notice his unthinking use of the word in this sentence: "Pretty, she is; sober, she ain't." An everyday ghetto expression impresses a White listener as a calculated obscene insult, though the Black may have used the expression as a ritual insult intended to cool things down. A school teacher will find the only expressions known to a Black child deliberately rude.

The way to avoid being offended by these unintended irritants is to realize that we all have different levels of speech usage--different styles (it is the mark of a foreigner to know only three or four stylistic levels), and that these will not necessarily coincide or have the same implications among speakers of different backgrounds. Dropping r's is looked up to in some English-speaking areas, but regarded in other areas as lower-class. Labov (1966) discovered an interesting correlation between styles and class-differences in the English of New York City. A given kind of English speech in one socio-economic class will correspond to that found in the next more formal style in the next lower class or in the next less formal style in the next higher class. (Labov found one well-defined exception to this principle that recurred in all his data.) This finding has since been corroborated in other areas; e. g., Detroit (Wolfram 1969). We all understand the whole spectrum of styles in our speech community, but we ourselves use them differently from others of different backgrounds. There is a large difference in American usage with respect to what is felt to be polite and impolite. Some use excessively polite utterances as a way of insulting their listener. Whites and Blacks in Jamaica (DeCamp MS) understand a large range of style gradations, but individuals slide up and down in their usage over only some part of that range.

The schooling most of us have received misleads us in our judgments about English speech. Speakers who in normal conversation say leggo, goob-bye, gimme, lemme, lessee, gonna, wanna, shoulda, opem, happem, ebem (for even), idn't (for isn't), and dudn't (for doesn't) will unwittingly deny the truth, intending no dishonesty, and scold anyone else who they happen to hear employing such pronunciations, especially if they hear them being used in a style in which they themselves would not employ such forms--which is about the only time they would actually notice the pronunciations in question. Many people say things in informal style that they would not say in a formal speech; e. g., "My brother and his family, they . . ." It is only when such a use is out of place to their ears that they notice it and condemn it. Our schools could help human relations greatly by making students aware of such facts. Labov's studies have shown that within a speech community persons who produce a kind of English that is not considered standard in the locale--they may even be unaware of the facts about their own use--may nevertheless be quite cognizant of fine gradations in style, as attested in recognition tests subtly devised to bring out just such facts. Students should be taught that, while lenth, anshious, reconiæ, sugest, and congradulate may pass in one stylistic situation, they will not in a more formal style. This will have more salutary results and tell the facts of life more nearly as they are than teaching that the pronunciations just cited are to be avoided at all times. If this were combined with teaching children the forms of politeness the teachers are used to, a good deal of needless friction in the classroom would be obviated. Parallel comments are in order for employers who lay too much stress on speech in judging employees' characters.

There is a linguistic phenomenon called over-correction. It occurs when a person is corrected for a real error, but because he misjudges the nature of the error makes the alleged correction in the wrong places, changing what would have been correct forms into incorrect ones. Of course, what is viewed as correct in such a situation will depend on the person making the correction and the desire of the speaker that is corrected to emulate the corrector. If a schoolboy is corrected for saying, "Him and me did such and such," he will in all likelihood say the incorrect, "They gave it to he and I." If corrected for saying "He say" or, conversely, "I says," a person will end up with "They says" or "He say." Other common instances involve the use of whom, surely, etc. Some over-corrections are called spelling-pronunciations; for example, the pronunciation of t in often violates the English rule deleting it in soften, hasten, moisten, etc.

Over-corrections are not of merely academic interest for linguists. They offer important clues to the mental processes involved in speaking. Let me take one example from Fasold (1969a). When a speaker of standard English hears someone, for example a Black, say bof for both or either wit or wif for with, he might be ready to conclude that Black English lacked the th-sound in question. But the fact that Blacks never over-correct off to oth or wit to with shows that they know which words end in f, which end in t, and which end in a variable sound that we might just as well consider to be th. Speakers of one kind of Black English, similarly corrected for pronouncing store like stow, never over-correct go to gore, demonstrating that in their minds they know which words may have the phonetic correlate of the r-spelling and which may not.

The teacher who is conscious of the history of our language, and of all languages, and realizes that languages never cease changing--developing, and never decaying--will not foolishly attempt the impossible and try to hold linguistic changes back. For all we know, the usages of Black English which are condemned in the schools today may be looked up to and used by the most educated Whites tomorrow. In fact, some things condemned by school-masters today are indeed used in normal conversation by cultivated speakers. But consider the perspective of time. Five thousand years ago the ancestor of our word queen simply meant "woman" and, by implication, "wife." The word climbed up the social ladder between Old and Modern English until it came to mean "queen," though another variant of the word in Old English descended the social ladder until it meant "harlot" in Shakespeare's time. Today it has acquired the meaning of "male homosexual" in common usage. The word Black is another prominent example of change. Originally this word and its French and Spanish equivalents were neutral designations for Black people. The word went down-hill so far that the corrupt pronunciation of the French term, nigger, has come to be highly insulting. At the same time, the newly found racial pride of Afro-Americans has recently transformed the term Black from its non-preferred or rejected status of just a few years ago into a consciously happy designation of Black people today. It is in fact only because of this new Black pride that we can talk as unselfconsciously about the matters under discussion as we are tonight. Only just three years ago one of the White scholars of Black English that I have earlier referred to had to apologize for emphasizing the non-White, Black origins of some of the characteristics of Black speech, because it seemed to him that at that time "Negro elites tend [ed] not to welcome any evidence of uniform

or stable behavioral differences between members of their own group (even lower-class ones) and those of the white-dominated middle class"--not to speak of African origins. (The quotation is from Stewart 1967:22.) Matters are, fortunately for all concerned, quite different today.

If the facts were clear to everyone, communication problems among members of this army post and members of American society in general could be reduced to the extent that interferences of style difference and the supposed unruliness of Black English would cease to bother us or influence our interpersonal attitudes. It is probable that no two forms of speech are ever intelligible to each other in the same degree; one will probably always be easier to understand than the other. Besides the linguistic factors involved in such an evaluation, there are the social factors, which are not fully understood yet. But it is known that speakers of a prestige idiom have genuine problems in understanding a fairly similar idiom of low prestige that do not exist on the other side. At any rate, we can always understand the other fellow better if we do not look down on him. If we go around saying that the speech of so-and-so in our outfit--the speech of a fellow-American--is unintelligible, we should know that others would then have a right to suspect us of holding obsolete views about the lack of logic or rules in the speech concerned. But it should also be remembered that one's ability to adapt to new language situations decreases markedly after the age of twelve or thirteen, and that adults differ a good deal in their flexibility and ability to understand new idioms. This means that we should not blame the other fellow for not adapting so well as we have adapted to a given situation. Though I do not regard education as a cure for the world's ills, I think a greater diffusion of the results of linguistic research into Black English would be beneficial to everybody.

We linguists have received benefits from studying Black English that I have so far left unmentioned. Linguists who have taken an interest in the analysis of Black English and other kinds of linguistic variation have acquired a whole new perspective on human language which has led to the abandonment of assumptions previously accepted by all linguists. The static assumptions that were universal only five years ago are now being replaced in some quarters with a new three-dimensional theory of language. We no longer view linguistic analysis as the investigation of a frozen slice of the data from one time and one place--an approach accepted by those who have remained indifferent to the true variety of language phenomena. We no longer write grammars of the language of an individual, but work on formulations of English as a whole--with all

its temporal, spatial, and style-class variety. Now the rules of this or that form of White English--British or American, Northern or Southern, educated or illiterate--are seen to be linguistically on a par in quantity and quality both with each other and with the rules of Black English. This sensible course has helped the theory of language in more subtle ways than we have yet discovered.

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